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Dianne Wampler 09/13/2006 11:46:07 AM From DB/Inbox: Dianne Wampler

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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 005212

SIPDIS

STATE FOR JASON BRUDER AND HENRY WOOSTER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/11/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: COMPULSORY MILITARY SERVICE IN IRAN: A MISNOMER?

Classified By: ACTING DCM DANIEL SREEBNY, FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d).

11. (S) Summary: Over a period of two months conoffs surveyed male Iranian visa applicants about the military service requirement in Iran. While all Iranian men upon reaching eighteen years of age are ostensibly required to fulfill a national military service requirement, many means exist for them to postpone, shorten, or altogether forego serving. Those who do serve often perform duties that are quasi-military or non-military in nature. Based on the experiences of the applicants interviewed, it appears that in practice the Iranian government uses the military service requirement more as a general national service requirement by which it obtains cheap labor to fill a variety of jobs. According to the interviewees, the government determines their assignments based on manpower needs and taking into consideration special skills and expertise of the draftees. End Summary.

12. (S) In summer 2006, conoffs queried forty male applicants aged eighteen to forty-five--men who reached the military service age of eighteen during the twenty-seven year existence of the Islamic Republic. The officers learned that nineteen of these men had, in one fashion or another, fulfilled Iran's military service requirement, while the remaining twenty-one were exempted from service.

THE THEORY: PARTICIPATION IS MANDATORY

13. (S) According to the people with whom we spoke, Iranian men aged eighteen and above are required to perform military service. This is consistent with such sources as the 2006 CIA World Fact book. The Iranians interviewed told officers the current length of service is twenty-four months; however, this has fluctuated over time and can vary for each individual. Currently, basic training for an ordinary conscript lasts three months.

THE PRACTICE: SOME RESTRICTIONS APPLY

14. (C) In the course of the interviews, it became clear that while the military service requirement ostensibly applies to all Iranian men, a plethora of means exist to delay, shorten, or altogether avoid serving. The most common means for avoiding service mentioned were buying an exemption and exemption due to physical or mental deficiency. Several applicants told us that they simply paid a fee to the Iranian government to be exempted. However, according to the interviewees, a change in the law in 2002 made it no longer possible to buy an exemption outright. At the time the law changed, the going rate for an exemption was five million toman, currently equivalent to about 5,500 US dollars. One man, aged thirty, described how when he was eighteen it was not possible to buy an exemption so he entered college, which allows service to be postponed until after graduation. During his third year of school the Iranian government re-opened the option to buy exemptions. The applicant believed the government did so to generate needed income.

15. (C) Some applicants told us they were exempted because they had poor eyesight, a bad leg, or other ailment. At the time of their interviews, these applicants appeared to have no physical or mental problems. Other men were exempted under a provision that allows them to avoid serving if they are the only son in their family and their father is over 59 years old when they reach military service age. One man said he was exempt because his only brother is mentally and physically handicapped.

HIT THE BOOKS INSTEAD OF THE TRENCHES

16. (C) It seems that those who have money and or connections have the means to skirt military service. Attending university was another common method the interviewees used to delay, shorten, or completely avoid military service. Entering college after high school allows men to postpone military service. Upon graduation, the government appears to make efforts to exploit their newly acquired skills by giving them assignments related to their field. For example, medical and dental school graduates will be assigned to work at government clinics, often in rural areas. Two physicians we spoke with told us that doctors serve only one year, and that their basic training lasts just forty days. Civil engineering graduates may supervise government construction projects, while electrical and computer engineers are likely to have office, administrative-type assignments.

17. (C) For those who are able, study and travel abroad can also be beneficial. We were told that residing abroad for five years or more is grounds for an exemption upon returning to Iran. Men who obtain an advanced degree abroad will be exempt from military service in exchange for spending a year teaching after they return. Separately we spoke to students seeking to attend college in the United States. They told us that in order to go abroad prior to completing their service, they are required to deposit five million toman with the government which they will forfeit if they do not return. (Comment: These provisions appear aimed at cultivated individuals with specialized skills and expertise in order to reverse Iran's brain-drain problem. End comment.)

18. (C) Some of our interviewees explained that at the time they reached military service age the ranks were filled and there simply was not a need for them, so they were exempted. This was more common among men who reached service age in the 1990s and later, likely reflecting the higher demand for recruits during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war and its immediate aftermath.

ASSIGNMENT AND LENGTH OF SERVICE MAY VARY

19. (C) Our interviewees told us that their assignments were chosen for them by the government. Most served in the regular army and three served in the police force. One man with whom we spoke served in the Basij and another served in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). These last two men told us that they were assigned to these forces and it was not out of any special requests or qualifications that they ended up serving in them. Those serving in specialized, essentially civilian positions related to their expertise, such as doctors, engineers, and accountants, were still subordinate to the army for pay, food, and housing. The two physicians with whom we spoke noted that while in the pay of the army, they received room and board and a monthly salary of about \$25. By comparison, they told us that once in private practice, they could expect to earn between five and ten thousand dollars per month. The length of service of our interviewees varied among and across age groups, with 11 of the 19 veterans having served for two years.

110. (C) Comment: While Iran has a potentially large pool of manpower available for military service, the percentage who actually receive military training may be considerably lower than Iran's compulsory military service requirement would imply. It appears Tehran frequently modifies the service requirement to address changing manpower needs and possibly to supplement its coffers during lean economic periods. Compulsory military service also provides Tehran a low-cost labor force. The current ban on the outright purchases of exemptions may indicate that Tehran is not in need of this extra source of income and/or that the military ranks need replenishing. Possibly the growing international tension and hints of military action in response to Iran's nuclear and foreign policies are making it more difficult for Tehran to recruit volunteers and re-enlist those it currently has under arms. Certainly none of the men we spoke to said that they looked forward to performing military service, and all those that could avoid serving did so. End Comment.

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